

## **History of the African Botanic Gardens Network**

At the 5th International Congress of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) held at Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, Cape Town, South Africa in September 1998, the African representatives called on the BGCI to redevelop an African focus, including an African Botanic Gardens Newsletter. This was to replace the Tropical Africa Botanic Gardens Bulletin that was initiated in 1989. This Bulletin was to be published yearly, but unfortunately only four editions appeared between 1989 and 1995. The idea of establishing an African Botanic Gardens Network (ABGN) was put forward again at the World Botanic Garden Congress held in Asheville, North Carolina, USA, in June 2000.

The success of the discussions between African botanic garden representatives and Fiona Dennis of the BGCI in Asheville brought about the publication of the first issue of the new African Botanic Gardens Network Bulletin in October 2000. Prior to the Asheville meeting in June 2000, Nouhou Ndam of Limbe Botanic Garden in Cameroon had in 1995 also called for the biological institutions of Africa to form a network.

In March 2001 it was agreed at the inaugural meeting of the SABONET - supported Southern African Botanical Garden Network to hold the first Congress Steering Committee meeting in Aburi Botanic Gardens, Ghana. Consequently, the follow-up meeting to the African Botanic Gardens Network inaugural meeting in Asheville was held at the Aburi Botanic Gardens, Ghana, in June 2001. Hosted by George Owusu-Afriyie (Ghana), the historic meeting was attended by representatives from Cameroon (Christopher Fominyam), South Africa (Christopher Dalzell and Christopher Willis), Theophilus Agbovie of Aburi Botanic Gardens and Fiona Dennis of BGCI.

The conclusion of this meeting was an agreement to hold the first African Botanic Gardens Congress in 2002. Exactly a year after the Aburi meeting, the Steering Committee met again at Aburi Botanic Gardens, Ghana, from 11-14 June 2002, to evaluate the progress that had been made. Regional Co-ordinators present at this meeting were Fiona Dennis (representing BGCI and North Africa), George Owusu-Afriyie (West Africa), Christopher Fominyam (Central Africa), Christopher Dalzell and Christopher Willis (Southern Africa) and William Wambugu (East Africa). The Aburi meeting confirmed that the Congress would be held at the Durban Botanic Gardens, South Africa, from 24-29 November 2002. This is very historic and timely, coinciding within a period of a few months with the birth of the African Union in Durban, South Africa, where African Heads of State were present to welcome the new African Union.

From 24-29 November 2002, 67 delegates representing 23 African countries and various non-African delegates attended the first ever African Botanic Gardens Congress in Durban Botanic Gardens, South Africa, to establish the new African Botanic Gardens Network (ABGN). Africa, defined as continental Africa and the surrounding islands, was divided into six regions, namely North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands.